

Senator Harry Reid

SPECIAL REPORT

Clark County

Clark County is among the fastest-growing areas in the country. Nevadans' ingenuity and hard work has driven this startling development and will be essential in meeting the economic, educational, and other challenges associated with its growth. I am committed to doing all I can to give Clark County's local officials, educators, first responders, and health care workers the support they need in improving the quality of life in Clark County.

Fighting for Better Health Care

I want to make better health care available to every Nevadan by cutting costs, improving quality, and expanding access. I would like to share with you a few initiatives that I have been working on to improve health care in Clark County.

I recently held a Medicare Town Hall meeting with seniors in Las Vegas to discuss their questions and concerns about the new Medicare prescription drug bill. Some seniors had questions about the complicated new discount card and even more expressed concerns that they might have worse coverage under the new bill. Concerns like these are why I have redoubled my fight to give seniors the drug coverage they really need, to cut prescription drug costs, and to strengthen Medicare. I support legislation that would ensure that the savings from the new discount cards go to seniors rather than big drug companies. Americans also should have the right to realize the cost savings from safe, imported prescription drugs, and Medicare should be empowered to negotiate lower drug prices on behalf of America's 40 million seniors.

Among the most significant challenges facing Clark County's health care system is ensuring an adequate number of well-trained nurses. That is why I have strongly supported initiatives to expand nursing education throughout the country and why I secured \$500,000 last year in federal assistance to support the nursing program at the Community College of Southern Nevada. I also have worked to ensure high-quality health care for Clark County's growing Spanish-language community by securing federal funds to provide interpreter services at area hospitals.

I also have been fighting to improve Nevadans' cancer care, including securing millions of dollars in federal funding to help create the Nevada Cancer Institute in Las Vegas. This leading edge cancer center will provide Nevadans close access to advanced cancer technologies not currently available in the state.

Expanding Educational Opportunities

As someone whose life was transformed by education, I am strongly committed to providing a high quality education

to all of our children. That means ensuring our schools and students have the resources they need to succeed.

I have been working to secure Nevada's fair share of federal education funding. Too often federal education programs use formulas in determining assistance that underestimate the populations of high-growth areas, like Clark County. That is why I introduced legislation last year to require the Department of Education to use population data no more than two years old in determining assistance under the Head Start program—a program that provides critical early childhood development services to help young children prepare for kindergarten.

I also have been working hard to support Clark County School District. I secured funds last year for academic enrichment activities that help prepare students for the Nevada exit exams. I helped provide additional support for intensive reading and mathematics intervention programs for economically disadvantaged students who are below grade level in math and reading. Our children are our future, and we must give them all the support they need to reach their full potential.

Protecting and Improving Our Economic Base

Throughout my career, I have fought to maintain a prime engine of Nevada's economy —gaming. As Nevada's Gaming Commissioner in the late 1970s and early 1980s, I worked to rid the industry of crime, making it more attractive to tourists and Nevadans alike. As a senator, I have protected casino workers' tips from increased taxes, worked to repeal industry taxes, and supported programs to train new workers.

The importance of gaming in Nevada is revealed by the numbers. In 2003, gaming supported 192,812 jobs in Nevada, paying approximately \$6.954 billion in wages. In that year, Nevada's casinos generated a gross revenue of \$9.625 billion and paid \$776.5 million in taxes to help support education, local governments and the general fund. Nevada's gaming workers help keep Clark County's economy humming, fueling the strong demand for housing, transportation and other goods and services.

Given this importance, it is critical that federal government policies help — not hinder — gaming. In 2003, when the Administration was poised to impose a doubling or tripling of federal taxes on casino workers' tips, I worked with Senator Ensign to block the plan. Subsequently, the casinos negotiated an extension of the current tip-tax system.

When a proposal in the Senate to repeal the excise tax on Indian gaming gained steam, I made sure to amend the proposal to repeal the same tax for our casinos — helping to ensure that this tax benefit was enjoyed across the board and not limited to tribes.

With those who visit casinos spending less than four hours per day there, the gaming industry has broadened into other hospitality services. I have worked to ensure that the citizens of Clark County have access to the job training necessary to take advantage of these new job opportunities. For example, I secured \$700,000 in federal dollars to facilitate a public-private partnership to create a premiere industry training facility.

I have worked hard to garner federal support for initiatives to expand Clark County's high-technology sector, and I was proud to be named the Information Technology Industry Council's High Tech Legislator of the Year. For example, I secured \$300,000 for the Biotechnology Center at the University of Nevada, Las Vegas to develop new biotechnology initiatives that will add to the diversity of Nevada's economy with high-paying, science-based careers.

Lifeblood of Southern Nevada's Economy: Water

Mark Twain's observation that in the West "whisky is for drinking and water is for fighting" is no less true today than it was when he coined the adage many years ago. The availability of water in southern Nevada is fundamental to maintaining a strong economy. As Nevada grapples with its worst drought in modern times, I have worked with the Southern Nevada Water Authority and other local water officials to help safeguard Nevada's precious water. I recently convened a Western Water Summit with local leaders and federal government officials to assess the situation and craft solutions.

One issue which became clear at our meeting was the need for better federal government management of the lower Colorado River. Nevada has the smallest legal allocation of Colorado River water at 300,000 acre feet annually. Both Arizona and California have legal allocations in the millions of acre feet, with California receiving 4.4 million acre feet a year. The overwhelming majority of this water goes to agriculture.

Although these allocations were set legally many years ago, there are ways to more effectively manage the system. For example, over the last several years an active water market has developed in California whereby urban water agencies pay farmers to use their water in times of drought. At our Nevada meeting, I raised this issue and the potential to allow Nevada to enter that market by allowing the State to lease water in much the same way during times of drought.

Another important way to assure southern Nevada's water supply is through better management of our in-state resources. As the senior member of the Senate Committee on Appropriation's Energy and Water Development Subcommittee, I annually write the funding bill which allocates the federal government's resources to help assure water supplies. From this position I have provided millions in federal funding to increase the number of water recycling efforts in Clark County – saving precious drinkable water by recycling non-potable water for use in landscaping and water features. I also fund research and other projects designed to tap the ocean for potable water by expanding desalinization work.

While there is a lot I can do at the federal level to help assure our water supply, each of us individually can make a dramatic impact on the effort. For the last several years, Southern Nevada Water Authority has been working with the public on efforts to install water saving devices and to remove grass. Today, enough grass has been removed in southern Nevada to stretch a line of grass all the way across the United States from Las Vegas to Washington, D.C. and halfway back. With landscaping consuming roughly 80 percent of southern Nevada's water, this simple step has already netted significant water savings. To find out more about removing grass and desert landscaping and Southern Nevada Water Authority's program to help, check out <http://www.snwa.com/html/wsl.html>

Strengthening Law Enforcement

Clark County law enforcement agencies face significant challenges in meeting both the law enforcement needs of a rapidly growing population and

the increased demands of homeland security since September 11, 2001. I am disappointed that the Administration has proposed to slash \$1 billion in federal aid to local law enforcement agencies during these difficult times. Clark County officers are working hard to keep our communities safe. They need more resources, not less.

Last year, I secured federal support for the Las Vegas Metro Police Department SWAT Team's new mobile command post. This post will allow officers to better respond to emergencies by facilitating communication with officers on the scene and directing operations in crisis situations. I also steered additional funds to the Las Vegas-based Development Foundation, which provides assistance to the victims of domestic violence. Working closely with the Clark County Division of Child and Youth Services, the Foundation has focused many of its efforts on child victims.

I authored legislation in 2002 to dedicate 2880 acres of public land in the Las Vegas Valley for a public shooting range, sports park, and firearms training facility. The project will strengthen Clark County law enforcement by providing officers with safe and modern facilities for training exercises. It also will compensate for the loss of traditional shooting areas that has resulted from the Valley's rapid urbanization by providing safe recreational facilities for local sportsmen.

Improving Transportation

Transportation is critical to Clark County's economy and quality of life, and I am committed to improving our transportation system. This is one reason I have sought positions in the Senate that improve my ability to ensure that Nevada receives more transportation dollars.

As a member of the Senate Appropriations Committee's Subcommittee on Transportation, each year I secure millions in funding for Clark County's transportation priorities. And, as the ranking member of the Senate Environment and Public Works' Subcommittee on Transportation and Infrastructure, I was a principal author of the 6-year transportation bill that passed the Senate earlier this year and substantially increases Nevada's share of federal transportation dollars.

For example, I have secured millions of federal dollars for the Las Vegas monorail and the California-Nevada magnetic levitation (maglev) train projects. The California-Nevada Superspeed train will allow travelers to visit California or Nevada via a train that will connect Las Vegas to Los Angeles on a short 90-minute ride. The Las Vegas Monorail at first will service

The Strip and downtown area and when finished will reach from McCarran Airport to northern Las Vegas. This monorail will be invaluable to the thousands of tourists and residents alike who wish to visit downtown and The Strip without dealing with traffic.

Air travel is fundamental to supporting Nevada's tourist and business economy and I have been fighting to ensure that McCarran International Airport helps speed visitors on their way to and from Las Vegas. In 2003, McCarran International Airport posted its second-busiest year ever with nearly 36.3 million arriving and departing passengers. I have secured millions of dollars to fund improvements at McCarran to help accommodate its increasing traffic, and I am working with local and state officials to shift heliport traffic from McCarran to a proposed heliport near Sloan.

I also have been vigilant in ensuring McCarran's security. I successfully opposed an effort last year by the Transportation Security Administration to reduce the number of screeners at McCarran, and I am pleased to say that the agency plans to increase the number of screeners over the next two years.

Conserving Our Natural Heritage

Our state has a rich natural heritage that must be protected for the enjoyment of current and future generations of Nevadans. I have been working on a bipartisan basis in the Senate to implement plans that will both preserve Clark County's precious areas and enhance economic opportunities for local residents.

In 2002, I authored legislation with Senator Ensign to provide a comprehensive public lands management plan for Clark County. It designated over 440,000 acres of wilderness area to help conserve environmentally sensitive land throughout Clark County and released more than 233,000 acres from current wilderness study area status to help promote economic development and access. The final bill was a good compromise measure that will improve the quality of life and promote economic development while enriching and protecting the awe-inspiring places that bless southern Nevada.

